Kamala Markandaya’s Nectar in a Sieve: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Indian women novelists have done tremendous work in upgrading the status of women who are bound to suffer and suffocate in a patriarchal setup. Women like Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Shobha Dey, Rama Mehta, Geeta Mehta, Anita Nair, Bharati Mukherjee, Mahasweta Devi, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more have left an indelible imprint in discussing the discourses of feminine sensibility. In this respect, the contribution of Kamala Markandaya as a novelist is immense. Her classic work, Nectar in a Sieve shows a great struggling journey of women to exist under a patriarchal domination.

Keywords

Exploitation, Women sentiment, Feminism, Constant humiliation, Search for Identity.

“Nectar in a Sieve” is a classic work in both theme and feeling. In theme it deals with a society in which women are not only ill treated but also exploited without any rhyme or reason. They are looked down upon a foul smelling object in Nectar in a Sieve. The protagonist feels like a caged bird fluttering to break open the cage. Rukmani the central character is the narrator of Nectar in a Sieve.

She recollects several events of her life. She remembers her marriage with Nathan and their efforts to survive against the calamities of nature and also against the disturbances caused by the tyranny recently setup. The second part of the novel depicts realistically, the couple, search their son, their miserable life and their experiences in a city life but in spite of several odds and hazards

Rukmani and Nathan succeeded in leading a life, full of obstacles but they are so much fed up
with uncertainty of nature that they become fed up in the long run.

In the last section of the novel they feel themselves like the typical characters of Thomas Hardy who are very afraid of Time, Chance and Providence.

About the thematic analysis of Kamala Markandaya is novelist A.K. Bhatnagar rightly observes:

“Kamala Markandaya” is gifted with a fine faculty of artistic perception. The realistic presentation of life in all the novels impresses one and all. She travelled widely in South Indian villages with her father so she has a first-hand knowledge of the life of poor peasants living at the mercy of nature and also various hardships due to the advent of modernism. After her marriage with English man Markandya settled in England. She has a first hand knowledge of her problems of non-white in England. All these facts of life has been boldly depicted by her in her novels without any exaggerations.¹

The predicament of women the Plights and persecution in a patriarchal hegemony is the central note that revolves around the whole story of the novel. The nectar in a sieve. The poverty, starvation and malnutrition is another Central theme of the novel. Nathan the hero of the novel has to lead a life of poverty paying exorbitant rent to the jamindar after the best harvest. This novel is also present unwanted clemency is caused by nature it also Shows how the people of the village fall prey to starvation hunger and malnutrition when their harvest fails. So, in order to exist life they have to sale their possessions like vessels and clothes. The novels also deals with the bad consequences of the early marriage of a girl child. This is what we find in the life of Rukmini who is married to Nathan at the tender age of 12: the age of enjoying the pleasure of childhood, without any sense of responsibility. So three phases of her life as a young child, young wife and an old mother have been depicted artistically and skillfully by Kamala Markandaya. The most suffering scene of her life is the time she loses her dearest husband and her suffering the undeserved pains and despairs. But she is a lady of passion love and affection she never vaccinates and waivers was in her attitudes. She maintains her lovable humanity and dignity even at the critical junctures.

In this respect Kamala Markandaya has given such a beautiful woman character which we generally find in the great works of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and Virginia Woolf about the painful situation of her life. Rukmani expresses her sentiments:

“Sometimes at night I think that my husband is with me again coming gently through the mists and we are tranquil together then morning comes the wavering grey turns to gold. There is stirring within as the sleepers awake and softly departs.”²

One of the important themes of the novels is rootlessness. It shows how the sweet company of human being living in a traditional family life full of mirth and joy is broken by the effects of industrialization. Kamala Markandaya is of the opinion that the industrializations break the sweet relationships and the personal relationship of human being living in and around the village in the lap of nature free from the din and bustle of the city light. Due to the effects of bad effects of industrialization exodus to the city is a common feature that gives birth to rootlessness which is fraught with suffering and tragedy. Due to an account of high raises in price the farmers of the village are unable to make their both ends meet by working on the land. So the people of the village have no option but to migrant from the lovely village and settle in the industrial town.

Raghukul Tilak rightly observes: “Nathan had his roots deep in his land and he lives on so long as he is not uprooted from the land he is able to face successfully with courage and determination the misery and starvation caused by unprecedented droughts and rains. But the tyranny swallows up their land and they are evicted depressed. Nathan is forced to the city to seek shelter there with his son Murugan, this rootlessness to him is unbearable. His soul is a scared.”³
So, far as the views and vision of this novel is concerned it seems to be very near to Pearl S Buck. *The Good Earth* and K K Venkataramani “Murugan, The Tiller”

The novel presents a very realistic picture of Indian villagers their life and customs. rights and traditions. These villages have to work hard to earn their bread. In other words they tried their best to churn nectar from the ocean of mother earth but sometimes all their hardships fall flat without giving birth to any result remembering of the famous phrases of John Dryden “pangs without birth” and “fruitless industry”

It also justifies the title “Nectar in a Sieve” which shows how their nectar is bound to replace in the sieve. The characterization of Rukmani reminds us of Elizabeth Jane of the famous novel Mayor of Casterbridge by Thomas Hardy.

It also reminds us AMMU, Central character of Arundhati Roy “The God of Small Things”.

One of the leading theme of Nectar in a Sieve is the miserable plight of women. This shows apart from many other things, the struggle of women against the male domination and their search for their identity.

Ira, the poor girl has to take the help of prostitution in order to save the family from starvation during the famine.

She also gives birth to an illegitimate albino child who became the pet of Selvam. The starvation also takes away the life of old Granny and Kutti. Nathan and Rukmini have left the village in search of Murugan. On the other hand, Murugan has left his wife and gone away with the help of Puly, young orphan character the family survives on charity and pettey jobs. In the long run Nathan pays his debt to nature and so Rukmani returns to her village Puly. About the rural life as presented in the Nectar In a Sieve PV Ghodpade rightly holds that:

“Agriculture is the main stay of the village. Kamala Markandaya does not present the life of the big landlords but also the life of landless farmers who are also the most neglected people. Rukmani has come from a family who won the land they till. But her husband Nathan does not own the land that he tills. The landless farmer in particular is constantly in the grip of fear of the land being a snatched away or excess of rain, drought etc. Markandaya gives very realistic and touching account of such fear.”

To sum up, Kamala Markandaya Nectar in a Sieve presents the tragic irony engendered by both man and God. Man has created so many industries which give birth to a number of problems creating a chasm in the personal relationship in human being. It has also given rise to hunger, starvation and malnutrition which is a burning topic even today. On the other hand, there are some natural calamities which act like a volcanic eruption in the life of poor peasants.

**Conclusion**

So, the character of Kamala Markandaya assumed an epical dimensions which we generally find in the tragedy of Shakespeare. The characters of Kamala Markandaya are like those of the characters of the tragedies of Shakespeare who suffer for existence because “it is suffering that purifies their soul”.

**References**


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